

Seamen's Bethel
75 Church Street
(relocated on University of
South Alabama campus)
Mobile
Mobile County
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-779

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,
115-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

SEAMEN'S BETHEL

Location: Originally at 75 Church Street; dismantled and re-erected on the campus of the University of South Alabama, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

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Present Owner: University of South Alabama

Present Occupant: "Theatre USA", Speech and Drama Departments

Present Use: Theatre, office space and classrooms

Statement of Significance: Many prominent American seaport cities in the nineteenth century had Seamen's Bethels, of which this is one. These institutions were established to care for the spiritual and physical welfare of Protestant seamen.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1860
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following information was contained in an article published in the Mobile Press Register on September 12, 1965:

" 'Seamen's Home, a corporation conducting a philanthropic institution and carrying on in its work for the promotion of the welfare of seamen in the city of Mobile, under and by virtue of the act of the Legislature of Alabama, approved, January 25, 1845.' Though this was the Act which incorporated the Seamen's Institute, the work started long before 1845 in the old Henry Stickney home on Water Street with the Bethel (church) in the block south of the home. It remained there until 1860 when the Trustees of the Seamen's Home bought the property we know as 75 Church Street and built the Bethel on that site. In 1901, the attached brick building to the east was added and in 1909, the tower was removed and windows put in the Bethel on each side of the entrance and to the rear of the pulpit, in a general renovating and restoring of the old building. In June of 1923, the Bethel was sold to be used for many years as the 'Little Theatre of Mobile!...' "

In 1968, the building was dismantled and moved to the campus of the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

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B. Bibliography:

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1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,
Mobile, County

Minutes, Seamen's Club of Mobile, August 26, 1909

2. Secondary and published sources:

Nineteenth Century Mobile Architecture, An Inventory
of Existing Buildings, Mobile: Mobile City Planning
Commission (unpublished manuscript to be published 1972).

Prepared by Linda Carroll
Student Historian
August 29, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modest church building has a single-aisle plan. Pointed arches which frame the openings and rose windows on the north and south walls identify the structure as an example of the Gothic Revival style, but the details lack refinement and the over-all design is very simple.
2. Condition of fabric: The building was in generally poor condition before it was dismantled and moved in 1968.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: A rectangular one-story structure, the exterior dimensions are 40'-0" (three-bay front) x 60'-0" (three-bay side), excluding the projecting entrance and stoop on the north front.
2. Foundations: Not accessible
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The brick walls, laid in common bond, are 1'-4" thick and were painted white before the building was dismantled and rebuilt. The present exterior

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brick is unpainted.

4. Structural system, framing: The floor framing was not accessible. Roof framings consist of a truss system using mortise and tennon and notched joints, and an independent roof framing system of 2" x 6" rafters, spaced 1'-11" on center, and bearing on a single 4" x 8" purlin at the midpoint of the top chord of the truss.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: There is a single concrete entrance stoop on the north.
6. Chimneys: There is a single low brick chimney near the southwest corner of the building.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The single original entrance is a wide opening, with pointed arch trim, stuccoed brick. The opening contains two wooden panelled doors that each have six vertical panels. Above, in the tympanum, are two hinged panels. It appears that the existing doorways on the south wall, presently sealed on the exterior, were originally windows, one of them still containing a double-hung sash.
 - b. Windows and shutters: On the north front, there are two pointed-arch openings, one each side of the central doorway. Each contains a fixed glazed panel above the springing of the arch and double-hung wooden sash with four-over-six lights (10" x 20"). A simple six-light rose window over the entrance is framed in a stuccoed brick oculus, and is horizontally pivoted. On the south wall, there is a rose in the center which is now boarded up and the remaining two openings, with double-hung windows still in place, have been enlarged into doorways, also boarded over. On the west wall, each of the three window openings has a flat head and contains double-hung wooden sash with six-over-six lights (10" x 22"). When the annex was added on the east wall, two of the windows matching those on the west were converted into doorways, and the center opening was filled and plastered.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gabled roof has a 1:3 pitch, and is covered with a mixture of slate (probably the original), tin and roll roofing.

- b. Cornice, eaves: There is no existing cornice, although the north and west walls are treated with brackets of tin-plate. The rear south wall is parapeted 2'-0" above the roof.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None exists today, although there was originally a squat tower over the entrance. Evidence of the supports may still be seen in the roof framing.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The interior is a single room without a vestibule. Adaptation for use as a theatre has added a stage on the south and a balcony on the north.
 - 2. Stairways: There were no original stairways.
 - 3. Flooring: Flooring consists of random-width pine boards.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster on lath that is attached to nailers set into the masonry joints. The flat ceiling is presently tongue-and-groove boards, although there are traces of plaster on the ceiling joists.
 - 5. Doorways and doors: The doors leading to the 1901 addition are not significant.
 - 6. Special decorative features, trim: The windows have simple moulded frames.
 - 7. Notable hardware: None remains.
 - 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: A single flue and chimney indicates that the original heating was provided by a stove.
 - b. Lighting: Modern electric lighting has been installed.
- D. General setting and orientation: The building was located on the south side of Church Street between Water and Royal Streets, facing north. It was dismantled and reconstructed on the campus of the University of South Alabama, Mobile.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervising Architect
National Park Service
July 8, 1966
and
Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August 1, 1972

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn University), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.